

## **black butterflies and déjà vu by ilmostro**

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**Summary:**

will meets mike the first day of kindergarten. it takes him 10 years and a demogorgon epidemic to tell him how he feels.

## black butterflies and déjà vu

### Author's Note:

just a will-centric one shot about him growing up with feelings the boys his age don't have about other boys, and mike's the star of the show (the show is his heart thx for reading)

p.s. listen to the song in the title (by The Maine) and tell me it isn't byeler as fuck go ahead.

i'm @tozbraks on tumblr! let me know what you thought

On the first day of kindergarten, Will Byers sat on the swing set alone. He didn't need to kick much to swing lightly, it was a windy day and he was smaller than most boys his age, barely hitting the 38 pound mark. His family weren't starving or anything, he had just always been... fragile. The September wind swayed him easily.

He tried to make friends today, but everybody seemed to already know each other and he had never been a very confident child. So, instead of running around with the other kids, he sat on the swings and hoped for a better day tomorrow.

He didn't know what to think when he saw a boy from his class approach him slowly. The boy was average height, with huge brown eyes and a scattering of freckles across the bridge of his nose and cheeks. He looked nervous, his fingers twisting and untwisting together. They looked at each other for a moment.

“C-can I sit?” The boy asked, vaguely gesturing to the empty swing next to Will. He nodded, maybe a little too eagerly.

He sat down on the swing, grabbing the chains along either side and kicking his legs out just enough to swing him gently. They were silent for a moment, not really knowing what to say to each other.

“Do you want to be my friend?” The other boy blurted out, his big

eyes growing impossibly larger, the tips of ears red with shyness. Will could have cried he was so happy.

“Yes!” He said excitedly, and the other boy gives him a shy, but bright smile.

“I’m Michael,” he said, holding out his hand. Will took it in his smaller one, shaking it firmly the way his dad taught him.

“I’m Will. It’s nice to meet you, Michael,” he answered, the way his mom taught him. Michael leaned back into his own swing, kicking his legs harder to start actually swinging. Will copied him, happy to have made a friend.

“Mike,” his new friend said after a moment. “I like Mike better.”

“Okay,” Will answered.

He liked Mike, too.

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Will was almost twelve when he realized all the other boys in his class were obsessed with girls, and he had never even spared a thought towards one. All he cared about was his role in the party and getting to see Mike after school every day.

It worried him. It worried him a lot. His dad had always commented on how strange he was, and different, and the kids at school did too. He could deal with being called a geek, a dork, a nerd. He could handle the bullies and the occasional beatings. But this... this was something else. This was dangerous.

He couldn’t talk to Lucas, or Dustin. The two were as girl-crazy as the rest. Mike, though... Mike hadn’t mentioned a girl once. Maybe he was different, too.

Will shook his head. He had no way of knowing what Mike did or didn’t feel. And he needed a certain amount of courage before he asked.

So he waited. Seventh grade began, and Will saved his courage in a special space inside of him. He worked on his art, he drew the party, his Cleric character, and in a special box underneath his bed, he kept his drawings of Mike.

He didn't know why he only ever drew him, or why he could never seem to stop. Maybe because he could always see Mike's face so clearly in his mind whenever he thought about him. Yeah, that was it. He just... knew Mike's face better than anyone else's. And it was good practice. He got better every day.

Will promised himself he would ask to talk to Mike on the last day of school before break. He went through his classes, ate lunch with the party, tried not to look at Mike too often or too long, as usual. By the end of last period, he had all of his courage bundled up in his chest and he marched right to Mike's locker, only to find him talking to Rebecca James from their shared physical science class.

Mike was smiling in that shy way of his, a dusting of pink on his cheekbones. Rebecca stepped in a little closer, and Will watched as Mike's hands did his typical nervous tick; twisting his fingers together.

He turned around, and his courage poured out of him in waves. Mike wasn't like him. Nobody was. He felt more alone than he ever had.

He went home that night and just barely managed to keep himself from throwing out all of his sketches of his best friend. It was just practice, he told himself. They don't mean anything, he said, curling up in his bed and holding them to his chest.

It was just practice, he repeated, like a mantra. He cried himself to sleep.

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The demogorgon got him.

He was hiding in Castle Byers, in a terrifying place that looked like home but wasn't. It was dark, and eery, and everything smelled rotten and festered. He missed his warm house, and his family. He missed his mom's kisses and the warmth of the sun, the way his

brother would come into his room to wake him up for school. He missed his friends and the warm sound of their laughter, and he knew they had a campaign coming up and hoped they would get along fine when he inevitably died here. He realized they won't be able to find his body, in this alternate plane or whatever it is. The thought scared him so much he had to hold a hand over his mouth to stifle the sound of his crying.

He was terrified, and cold, and certain the monster would find him at some point. He sat huddled in his castle, facing what could be the end of his life, and thought of Mike.

His best friend Mike, his very first friend ever. He missed him so much he could hardly breathe. He missed the soothing sound of his voice, his hugs, the way he'd throw his arm around Will without a second thought. He missed Mike's Dungeon Master voice, the way he poured energy and life into their campaigns to make them real. He missed being able to ride his bike to Mike's house, and building forts in his basement, and lying together under the blanket roof weaving stories for hours.

He missed the way Mike's hair curled over his ears, and the fond look in his eyes when they met Will's. He missed how he always felt at home while listening to Mike's soft breathing while he slept. He knew it was wrong and disgusting to feel the way he should feel about girls about *Mike*, but in the secret of that horrible, dark place, he let himself admit it. Just once.

Mike Wheeler's had his heart since he was six years old.

And he'd never get the chance to tell him. A twig snapped somewhere a ways behind him and his heart stopped cold. He wiped the tears off of his face, counted to three, and ran.

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Mike came running through the hospital door and immediately threw himself at Will, and all the chill he had been feeling since he'd been rescued disappeared. Dustin and Lucas piled on, and he's so overwhelmed with happiness that he started to laugh. The rest of the party joined in, and eventually they were all just laughing breathlessly at each other.

Will quieted first, his eyes bright. “I missed you guys,” he said, but he was only looking at Mike.

Despite something else that was clearly bothering him, Mike gave him a soft, happy smile.

“We missed you too,” Lucas said, ruffling his hair. Dustin immediately launched into talking about their next campaign, and the moment is lost.

When Will was finally discharged from the hospital a couple of days later, Mike is waiting for him at his house. They spend the day watching their favorite movies, and eating all of Will’s favorite foods Joyce cooked up for him. She came in to check on him every five minutes, but he didn’t mind. He was so happy to be home again.

Mike sat close to him on the couch, closer than normal, and told Will everything he missed while he had been trapped in what they decided to call the “upside down”. Will listened in shock as he told him about Eleven, the mysterious girl with a shaved head and superpowers. About how she knew him, and how she was the one who opened the gate, but didn’t mean to. Mike’s voice caught when he started to tell Will about what happened in the school, and Will tentatively reaches out and puts his hand over Mike’s.

The other boy gave him a shaky smile, flipping his hand around to intertwine their fingers. Will sucked in a breath, reminding himself that Mike didn’t think about it like that. He needed comfort, and he was taking it. That was all.

Mike steadied himself, still holding Will’s hand, and told him about how he asked Eleven to the Snow Ball, and how she then defeated the monster at the cost of what might have been her own life.

“I’m so sorry, Mike,” Will whispered, genuine. He couldn’t imagine how Mike felt, losing two friends in one week. He came back, but Eleven was still gone. “She must have been awesome, for you to ask her to the dance.”

Mike nodded, smiling gently. “Yeah, she... she was amazing. Is amazing. She’s still out there, I can feel it. I just wish she would come

home.”

“She will,” Will reassured him. Mike surprised him by laying his head on Will’s shoulder.

“I missed you so much.”

Will’s heart kickstarted. “I missed you, too.”

“Don’t ever disappear again. I’m serious.”

“I’ll really try not to.”

“Promise me.”

“Mike, I can’t j—”

“Promise me. I can’t lose you again.”

Will closed his eyes, hoping to god Mike can’t hear the way his heart pounds against his ribcage.

“I promise.”

Mike’s hand tightened around his. “Thank you. What movie do you want to watch next?”

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He hit the floor with a thud, his head smacking painfully against the tile.

“Welcome to Hawkins High, freshie.”

A kick to the stomach. Will curled in on himself protectively, wondering why he thought high school would be any different. He just came to grab his books from the gym locker, he had even made sure to be the last one in, to avoid this exact scenario.

“Heard down the vine that you were a little fag, freshman. Where’s your boyfriend, then?”

He felt a boot on his shoulder, prepared to roll him over for more hell, he guessed.

“HEY!”

The relief in his body was almost too much to handle. His favorite voice in the world carried from down the hall, and Will opened his eyes in time to see Mike stalking towards the assholes currently standing over him, fury carved into the features of his beautiful face. Eleven was right behind him; she must have told him Will was in trouble. He had become close with her when she had returned, because Mike had been right. She did understand, and she had a naturally calming presence that made her easy to talk to. Almost as easy as Mike, if he was being honest. He wasn’t surprised to see them together– they nearly always were. However, to his secret relief, they weren’t dating anymore. They shared a deep, genuine connection –no one could deny that– but they discovered it was mostly just puppy love that led them to date, and the excitement of experiencing it for themselves. They were inseparable, just as they had been, but it was entirely platonic.

Will scrambled away from the two giant teenagers. They really were fucking huge, at *least* Juniors, and from the looks of their varsity jackets, football players. Figured.

“What did you fucking call him?” Mike was seething, fists clenched at his sides.

One of the Juniors raised an eyebrow, a smirk on his lips. “This him then, Byers?”

Nobody, not even Will, saw the punch coming.

It happened in a blur; one second Mike was over by Eleven and the next he’s standing over the tallest bully’s unconscious body, his face twisted like he could smell stinking garbage. Mike had grown over the summer. A lot. He took self defense classes, he grew almost a whole half a foot since middle school, standing at a solid six feet and counting. He was still lanky, but he had begun to fill out, and Will had to bet that punch hurt like a motherfucker.

He wondered if hearts really could replace people’s eyes in real life, just like in cartoons, and then he wondered if he would ever be able to be around Mike again if they did.

Eleven twitched her head to the side, and the second bully hit the lockers with a crash, out cold.

“Are you okay?” She asked him while walking over to Mike and placing a hand on his arm. Mike snapped out it, immediately kneeling down to check on Will.

“I’m fine,” Will said, gingerly touching the back of his head. “They barely started in on me. Thanks, guys.”

Eleven smiled at him, nodding her head once. Mike caught his hand as he took it away from his head, looking at the blood left on his fingers.

“I’ll fucking kill them,” he said, already turning around as if he was going to wake them back up just to hit them again. Will grabs his hoodie sleeve, tugging him back around.

“Mike, forget it,” he tried, voice quiet.

“After what they *called* you? They’re lucky they’re still in one piece,” Mike fumed, but he helped will up regardless, careful to mind his head. “We’re taking you home.”

“Actually,” Eleven started, looking apologetic. “Dad and I are supposed to go get him some new clothes for his date with Joyce tomorrow.”

Will nodded, remembering his mom mentioning them going to a new fancy place a little further upstate. “It’s okay, El. Thanks for your help. Get your dad something dark, okay? Mom said she liked when he wore darker shirts.”

El grinned, pointing at him MVP style. “Thank you! He’s impossible with colors, so that will help a ton. I’ll see you guys later. Mike, get him home safe.”

“Bye,” they respond in unison. Mike sighed, taking Will’s backpack from him despite his protests.

“Let’s get you home, Will.”

They biked to Will's house in silence, neither really sure what to say. Will unlocked the front door and walked in, Mike locking it behind them like he always did. There was a note on the table from Jonathan; he'd be home late. He already knew mom was working, so they were alone.

He sighed, heading to his room. He dropped his bag by the door and flopped down onto his bed, regretting it immediately when his head starts to pound. That was seriously going to hurt in the morning.

“Will?”

He looked over towards his door, and Mike was standing there, twisting his fingers together. Will sat up and patted the spot on the bed next to him.

Mike sat down quickly, looking at Will with a strange expression. He still looked handsome. Will's heart flips in his chest while he mapped the slope of Mike's nose, the freckles he could never seem to stop trying to count, his huge brown eyes, the curl of his hair over his ears. Mike blinked at him, and Will looked away quickly.

“Yeah?” He said, trying to sound casual.

“How... how come you don't have a girlfriend?”

Will had been scared of this question since the beginning of middle school. He quickly tried to think of something. “Girls don't really want to date the zombie boy.”

Mike shook his head. “You're lying. I'm your best friend, Will. You really think I can't tell?”

“I don't like any of the girls at our school.” Not technically a lie.

Mike twisted his fingers again. “But... there's more to it.”

Will could hear his own heartbeat, his blood rushing in his ears. “Mike—”

“Please be honest with me, so I can be honest with you, too.”

What was that supposed to mean? Mike was looking at him so earnestly, so *openly*, and Will didn't want to hide anymore. He was tired of pretending, tired of trying to be normal, tired of sitting a foot away from the only person he's ever wanted to kiss and not being able to.

"I don't... *like* girls. Like that," Will said tentatively, squeezing his eyes shut. He wouldn't be able to handle Mike's reaction. He was so terrified of losing his best friend, losing their closeness and their familiarity, their 2AM smiles and Mike's soft, sleepy breathing. He felt cold all over, sweaty in a way he only is after a bad nightmare.

"D–do you like anybody? Like that?" Mike asked, quiet, like Will hadn't just told him his biggest and most horrifying secret. He had to answer the question.

"Yes," Will whispered, trembling. He heard Mike suck in a breath.

"Who?"

Will was so close to tears, he had to tilt his head up to try and keep them from falling. "Mike–"

"Who?"

"You," Will confessed, tears falling freely. He didn't dare look at Mike.

"Oh," Mike breathed, and Will braced himself for a storm that never came. Instead, he felt two big, warm hands on his cheeks, turning his head towards the other boy. "Look at me? Please."

He opened his eyes.

Mike was smiling. Will almost thought he was dreaming.

"Why aren't you screaming at me?" Will asked, unable to comprehend what was happening.

Mike furrowed his brow. "Scre–? Why would I scream at you? You're my best friend, Will. I love you. I would never do that."

Will sniffled, trying to smile. “I love you, too.”

Mike huffed out a breath, pulling Will’s face closer and wiping his tears away gently. “No— Will, I *love* you.”

Now Will was confused. “I know, Mike. You just said—”

Mike sucked a breath in, realizing Will didn’t understand what he was trying to say. Will had just a moment to consider the way Mike suddenly scooted towards him, and then—

Mike was kissing him.

*Mike was kissing him holy sh—*

His best friend pulled away, smiling in that beautiful, shy way of his. The way he had looked at others before, but now he was looking at Will.

“Okay?” He asked gently, his cheekbones dusted pink, his eyes bright.

“How— *what?* ” Was all Will could stammer out. He knew his face was cherry-red, he could feel it. That didn’t matter, though. Mike Wheeler just kissed him. He felt a smile spread across his face before he could stop it.

Mike gave him one equally as bright. “Of course it’s you, dummy. It’s always been you. How could it not be?”

“You never said anything,” Will breathed. Mike was still holding his face.

“Neither did you!”

“But Eleven—”

“Fell head over heels for Max almost as soon as she actually gave her a chance,” Mike explained, still smiling. “But she called it off even before that. When she saw the way I looked at you...”

He didn’t finish, but he didn’t need to. Will felt the his bones settle, at

ease in a way they hadn't been in a long, long time. Mike's knee was pressed against his, Mike's hands on his cheeks, Mike's kiss on his lips. He let out one short, elated burst of laughter, and leaned in again.

It was just practice.